

The Director
Central Intelligence Agency



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Honorable James Abourezk
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Senator Abourezk:

I regret the delay in responding to your letter of 18 November 1977 which enclosed a copy of a letter to you from Mr. Carl Marcy, and contained five specific questions concerning the 1967 Israeli attack on the USS Liberty and CIA communications with Mr. Marcy on this matter.

As you know, Mr. Marcy has directly requested information on this subject from the CIA. These requests have been made under provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, and the Agency has responded to these requests in accordance with CIA procedures established pursuant to this Act. Since Mr. Marcy can pursue his interests under FOIA procedures, I will not attempt to address his concerns in this letter but am enclosing a copy of a letter to him. Set forth below are your five questions together with our comment.

1. Why was there no reference in the July 14, 1977 letter to Mr. Marcy to the existence of the CIA Intelligence Memoranda of June 13 and 21, 1967?

Comment: The letter of 14 July 1977, mistakenly identified both the 13 and 21 June documents as being originated by other agencies. The letter said that we had initiated action to have these papers reviewed by other agencies for possible release. After this review was completed, these papers were correctly identified as belonging to CIA. The 13 June report was then provided to Mr. Marcy on 2 September 1977. The 21 June report was not declassified and not provided to Mr. Marcy. The error in the 14 July 1977 letter to Mr. Marcy was an administrative oversight for which I apologize.

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2. Will you make available for my personal perusal the Intelligence Memorandum of June 21, 1967 which was withheld in its entirety from the American Palestine Committee?

Comment: While I have no objection to your seeing this document, it is a very sensitive paper containing references to intelligence sources, and is classified on a restricted basis. I suggest therefore that our mutual needs can be served by taking advantage of the procedures established by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. I am making a copy of the 21 June 1967 memorandum available to that Committee for your use.

3. Can you assure me that there are no Intelligence Memoranda, or similar documents on this subject prepared after 21 June 1967?

Comment: We have continued to search our records, particularly those for the period from early June through December of 1967, and have located two post-June 21, 1967 documents. Neither adds any new intelligence. Both are briefing papers prepared for CIA Congressional oversight committees. They do not change our position that the attack on the USS Liberty was a tragic mistake. You should know that we have recently found ten Middle East situation reports dating after the Liberty incident but before 21 June 1967. They do not contain any new intelligence on the Liberty affair nor do they change our overall evaluation of the cause of the attack.

4. If there are no such CIA documents relating to this incident, other than the three described as "unevaluated," how did the CIA decide that those three items did not alter the judgments made immediately after the attack?

Comment: The CIA analysts who were working on the Middle East in 1967 were experienced men and women who had been exposed to a great deal of raw intelligence over the years. It was their judgment that the three reports were based essentially on hearsay and speculation. These reports were considered to be substantially less trustworthy than other evidence which supported the conclusion that the attack was a tragic mistake. Nothing we have seen to this day alters that judgment.

5. Finally, could I have your judgment and that of the Agency you head, based on information acquired by the Agency from all sources, that the Israeli attack on the USS Liberty was deliberate or an honest mistake?

Comment: It remains our best judgment that the Israeli attack on the USS Liberty was not made in malice toward the United States and was a mistake.

I am sorry that the additional documents mentioned in this letter for the first time were not uncovered previously, even though they do not alter our conclusions. I do want you to know that we try very hard to avoid such incidents in our searching of the files. Historically though, for good reasons of limiting access to sensitive information, the CIA files are highly compartmented and lack a master index. The only way of conducting an exhaustive search is to ask each employee who may have any remote contact with a subject to search his or her files. Even this would not cover our files in the archives for which there is no central index. You may recall that we encountered a similar problem last summer when we unearthed some files on drug experimentation. Since then I have had a team of people going through the most critical portions of our archives to begin to bring some order to this situation.

I hope that these answers will meet your needs.

Yours sincerely,
/s/ Stansfield Turner

STANSFIELD TURNER

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